

COMMENT ON MURPHY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 54

Taken literally, all the provisions of this recommendation were carried out when the NIO system was established to do precisely these things. The text of the Commission Report makes it clear, however, that what is meant is the additional establishment of a successor organization to the ONE Staff.

It is indisputable that a high-quality staff devoted full time to the drafting of Estimates would produce papers of a high and steady literary standard. Experience with part-time drafters under the NIO system shows that the use of drafters detached from their regular jobs for individual papers results in uneven quality and generally poorer compositions than were obtained when a separate staff was dedicated to this task.

On the other hand, literary quality is not the most important aspect of an Estimate, and drafts can be improved, albeit at some expense, by NIOs and the USIB representatives. Furthermore, a staff substantively qualified to draft on the large number of geographical and functional specialties relevant to Estimates nowadays would not turn out to be very small.

In an era of scarce resources, it makes sense to use (always scarce) quality specialists on various kinds of intelligence production, rather than reserving some for drafting Estimates. In most specialties, not enough National Intelligence Estimates need doing per year to justify tying up quality analysts full time. In this connection, when the ONE Staff existed, it naturally tended to the overproduction of NIEs for obvious bureaucratic reasons.

Analysts involved in analytical and production efforts other than just Estimates are more in touch with the full range of developments in their fields and can often draft more informed and policy-relevant Estimates than officers concerned only with the estimative aspects

of production. Using Estimate drafters from various Community production offices encourages a greater degree of expert input and cross-fertilization of ideas and data than does the exclusive use of one staff, with the attendant bureaucratic tendency toward development of "house" points of view.

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15 July 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: Acting D/DCI/NIO

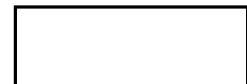
SUBJECT: Comment on Murphy Commission Recommendation 54

1. We have some serious problems with the proposed comments on Recommendation 54.

2. The draft comment assumes that the principal objective of the recommendation is to improve "literary quality". This is nowhere said in the recommendation, and I doubt that it is what the Commission has in mind. The real problem is that preparing drafts by detaching people from their regular jobs often results in products of poor overall quality, i.e., failure to address the right questions, failure to organize the paper properly, failure to make "tough estimative judgments", lack of clarity and the like. The lack of literary quality is only one aspect and, as the comment notes, not the most important one. The basic difficulty is two-fold: One, writing an estimative paper takes particular skills which few people possess and which cannot be quickly or easily acquired. The notion that anyone who is sufficiently "steeped in the particular substance" can write a good estimative paper is just plain wrong. Two, the drafters are not literally detached from their regular jobs; indeed, our experience is that they continue to give their regular jobs priority and must necessarily treat the drafting of an estimate as an add-on.

3. The third paragraph argues that analysts involved in analytical and production efforts can often do a better job than officers concerned only with the estimative aspects of production. Depending on what is meant by "estimative aspects" this could be a highly questionable assertion, and it in any event makes a false comparison, because no one is asking for drafters who are concerned only with "estimative aspects". One can turn this argument around and say that quality drafting will not result unless, in one way or another, we can get our hands on informed officers who can focus on the "estimative aspects" of analysis and production.

4. The proposed draft notes that tough estimative judgments require that the drafter be steeped in substance as well as being a good estimative writer. I do not know what "good estimative writer"



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means. What is needed is a man who not only is knowledgeable in a substantive field, but who can also understand and express the implications of the developments in his field, and, in particular, can draw meaningful conclusions about the future. The present system of drafting of papers is on the whole not surfacing such people and it remains to be established that they exist in sufficient quantity in the analytical and production components of the various agencies.

5. The last paragraph of the proposed comment reflects a state of mind which I find disturbing. I do not see how it can be said, flat out, that not enough NIEs need doing in most specialities to justify "tying up" (why not "using" or "employing") quality analysts full-time. This statement implies, wrongly, that all that is needed is actual drafting time. Ironically, after expressing these reservations about tying up the time of quality specialists, the proposed comment, in paragraph 2, serves up the time of NIOs (and USIB representatives!) to improve literary quality, which "is not the most important aspect of an estimate".

6. It is interesting that the Murphy Commission recommendation and the proposed comment talk only about NIEs. Surely there should be concern about the quality of other NIO-sponsored products, such as interagency memoranda.

7. Having said all this, I must confess that I do not know whether the recommendation of the Murphy Commission is the correct solution. The small staff it proposes would have to be substantively oriented. Furthermore, it could not be responsible for both "drafting" and "review" of NIEs. Nor should the staff itself report directly to the DCI. It is hard to tell, but Recommendation 54 seems to propose something outside the NIO system rather than within it. All this notwithstanding, it addresses a serious problem. If the Murphy recommendation is not the answer, we should come up with an alternative. The proposed comment, except briefly in the first paragraph, argues that all is now well, and this is patently not so.

  
National Intelligence Officer  
for Latin America

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15 July 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

THROUGH : Acting D/DCI/NIO and D/DCI/IC

SUBJECT : Comment on Murphy Commission Recommendation #54

1. I wish to record some disagreement with the argument and conclusion of the proposed response to Recommendation #54, and to suggest another line of response.

2. The argument in the draft comment rests chiefly on literary quality and is addressed only to formal NIEs. Literary quality is only one -- and probably the least -- of several important criteria. Moreover, NIEs are only one -- and in the present era not usually the most important -- of several forms of estimative, judgmental and forward-reaching papers being done by the Agency and the Community.

3. The Murphy Commission Recommendation does not talk about literary quality, and it is hardly responsive for the Agency comment to dwell on it. I would guess that what it is talking about are qualities of brevity, precision, and analytical rigor -- in short, the art of asking the right questions and giving analytical judgments and differences of view with economy of words, clarity of presentation, and relevance of argumentation.

4. My own experience as NIO in the past 21 months leads me to the view that the skills required to meet these criteria are not the same as those required for good current intelligence reporting or political research, that with some exceptions they are seldom found in the same analysts, and that in most cases OCI analysts are usually too committed to other requirements to do the job as it ought to be done. And this includes developing the skills over a period of time.

5. With certain notable exceptions, most of the major estimative jobs which have been done well in the past year and a half, and which have been done without inordinate delays, have been satisfactorily accomplished because the drafter and/or the chairman had learned the business on the staff of the former estimates office. (Notice I do not say the Board; it was the staff where these skills were learned, inculcated and flourished. We are still living on that capital and not replacing it.)

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6. It is of course true that NIOs and USIB representatives can improve the quality of drafts. They should and do. But experience has shown repeatedly that unless they have a good draft to begin with, they can bring it up to acceptable standards only at inordinate expense in time and effort, often with extensive delays, at the price of slighting other duties, and with a final result that is less than outstanding.


7. The foregoing is not intended to argue for recreating ONE or for a large estimative staff -- and certainly not for a staff devoted only to NIEs. The argument that not enough NIEs are done per year to justify tying up quality analysts full time on that account is quite true. But it is not really relevant. NIEs are only a part of the estimates business these days.

8. Moreover, the duty of reporting Agency differences, mentioned in Murphy Recommendation #54, is surely one of the prime responsibilities of the NIO and should not be transferred to anyone else.

9. What the foregoing is intended to suggest is that we should be a bit more forthcoming to the spirit of Recommendation #54 by:

- acknowledging we have had troubles (as the draft comment does);
- stating that we do propose to develop (or are developing) a small core of top quality drafters for estimates of all kinds, including but not confined to NIEs;
- that these will be charged as a first priority with support of NIOs in accomplishing interagency estimative tasks, as a second priority with other estimative tasks;
- that they may be drawn from whatever parts of the Community have the required top quality;
- that they will be attached to any of several production offices for administrative purposes and be available to help out there when not engaged on the above priority tasks. (This is only to illustrate a minimum-change option; I would not quarrel with a 5 or 6 man NIO drafting staff.)

This formula would improve and clarify a de facto set of practices which have been evolved but which are working now somewhat erratically and with some conflict and confusion of priorities.

  
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